

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the Claims as follows. Insertions are shown underlined while deletions are ~~struck through~~. Please add Claims 11-14.

1 (currently amended): A process for producing a porous metal body, comprising ~~the following steps~~:

(1) ~~a step of~~ maintaining under reduced pressure in the range between 10^{-1} and 10^{-6} Torr a raw metal material within a temperature range which is 50 to 200°C lower than the melting point of the metal in a sealed vessel to thereby degas the raw metal material;

(2) ~~a step of~~ melting the raw metal material under pressurization of between 0.1 and 10 MPa by introducing at least a gas containing nitrogen gas and optionally one or more type of gases selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, ~~nitrogen~~, argon, and helium into the sealed vessel to thereby dissolve the ~~gas or gases~~ in the molten metal; and .

(3) ~~a step of~~ pouring the molten metal into ~~the~~ a mold equipped with a cooling apparatus while controlling the gas pressure above and the temperature of the molten metal, cooling and solidifying the molten metal in at the mold inside the sealed vessel to form a porous metal body.

2 (currently amended): The process for producing a porous metal body according to claim 1, wherein the raw metal material is selected from the group consisting of iron, copper, nickel, cobalt, magnesium, ~~aluminium~~aluminum, titanium, chromium, tungsten, manganese, molybdenum, beryllium and alloys comprising one or more of these metals.

3 (canceled)

4 (canceled)

5 (canceled)

6 (canceled)

7 (canceled)

8 (previously presented): The process for producing a porous metal body according to claim 1, wherein the pressure applied in step (2) is between 0.2 and 2.5 MPa.

9 (canceled)

10 (original): The process for producing a porous metal body according to claim 1, wherein the cooling and solidification of the molten metal in step (3) is performed by a continuous casting method.

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11 (new): The process for producing a porous metal body according to claim 1, wherein said gas is a nitrogen-argon mixture, a nitrogen-helium mixture or a nitrogen-argon-helium mixture.

12 (new): A method for producing a porous metal comprising:

holding a metal under a pressure of between 10^{-1} and 10^{-6} Torr and at a temperature lower by 50 to 200°C than the melting point of the metal in a sealed vessel, thereby degassing the metal;

melting the metal under a pressure of between 0.1 and 10 MPa while introducing a gas mixture containing nitrogen gas and at least one gas selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, argon, and helium into the sealed vessel, thereby dissolving a part of the gas in the resultant molten metal; and

pouring the molten metal into a mold, and cooling and solidifying the molten metal in the mold to produce a porous metal.

13 (new): The method according to claim 12, wherein said gas mixture is a nitrogen-argon mixture, a nitrogen-helium mixture or a nitrogen-argon-helium mixture.

14 (new): The method according to claim 12, wherein the gas mixture contains hydrogen.